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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002285

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TAGS: PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: MALIKI VENTS HIS FRUSTRATION WITH THE SADRISTS IN PUBLIC

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Prime Minister Maliki warned the Sadrists in remarks to the media on July 7 to distance themselves from "Baathist and Saddamist" elements using the Sadrists name to undertake acts of violence. His remarks, apparently prompted by JAM confrontations with ISF in the south, provoked an outraged public response from leading Sadrists. In private, the Sadrists approached leading Dawa figure Ali al-Adeeb to see if Dawa supported Maliki's position, Adeeb told us on July 9. The Sadrists reaction may be compounded by feelings of isolation as ISCI and Dawa draw closer together and form a "group of four" with the Kurds. One CoR member said that Sadrists leaders were considering a complete withdrawal from the government. Maliki told the Ambassador July 10 that he would not relinquish his pressure on the Sadrists to disassociate themselves from violent 'gangs.' While Maliki's remarks represent exactly the sort of message Shi'a interlocutors need to deliver to the Sadrists, it will be critical for Shi'a leaders to manage the Sadrists' reaction.  
End summary.

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Remarks and Reaction  
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¶2. (SBU) After a meeting with President Talabani on July 7, Prime Minister Maliki warned the Sadrists to distance themselves from those who use their name "in killing and terrorist acts and violating the law on a daily basis everywhere." Noting that Sadrists leaders have repeatedly condemned violence against other Iraqis, he reasoned that those practicing the violence must be "impersonators" or "Saddamists and Baathists" who are not truly part of the Sadrists movement. His comments, later posted on the GOI website, caused an outraged public response from several Sadrists leaders. Sadrists spokesman Salah al-Ubaidi called Maliki's statement "a green light to the occupation troops to strike and annihilate the Sadr movement", and Sadr advisor Ahmed al-Sheibani predicted the fall of the Maliki government. Sadrists CoR member Baha al-Araji defended the Sadrists record and pointed out that Maliki became Prime Minister because of Sadrists support. Maliki's comments, while not a full-scale attack on the Sadrists, represent his most pointed public comments to date. A Fadhila CoR member remarked that Maliki "has been saying this sort of thing in private for months, but this is the first time in public."

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Sadrists and Dawa Go Back and Forth  
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¶3. (C) Ali al-Adeeb, leading Dawa CoR member, told PolCouns

on July 9 that the Sadr political office in Najaf had called him to protest the tarnishing of the Sadr image and to ask whether Maliki's statements represented the position of the Dawa party. According to al-Adeeb, he replied that Maliki's statements "represent your (i.e., the Sadr) position," in essence repeating Maliki's reasoning. He said that he urged the Sadrists not to cut off dialogue with the Shi'a coalition and to return to the CoR. Al-Adeeb said that Dawa, at the request of the Sadrists, had issued a statement on July 8 emphasizing that the Prime Minister's statement was not an attack against the Sadrists per se. He said he was waiting to hear the next round of the Sadrists' public remarks. PolCouns told Adeeb that Maliki's remarks were entirely proper and useful.

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Violence and Insecurity  
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¶4. (C) PM insider and CoR member Sami al-Askari (Shi'a Coalition, Independent) told Poloff late July 9 that Maliki made his statement after recent episodes of violence between JAM and Iraqi security forces in Samawah and Nasiriyah. "The Sadrists always say that Badr controls the police institutions and they have to defend their interests against Badr, and there is some truth to that," al-Askari continued. "But these episodes represented a direct challenge to the government and Maliki had to speak out." Maliki's comments may have aggravated a feeling of insecurity among the Sadrists given the current ISCI-Dawa discussions, increasing the virulence of their reaction. Al-Askari said the Sadrists felt "isolated" by the formation of the ISCI-Dawa-PUK-KDP "group of four", and leading ISCI CoR member Humam Hamoudi observed that the Sadrists were fearful of ISCI and Dawa

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forming a coalition to contest provincial elections in the center and south. (Prime Minister Maliki told the Ambassador July 10 that he would not relinquish his pressure on the Sadrists to disassociate themselves from violent 'gangs,' and he said he sensed the Sadrists were on the defensive. See septel.)

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A Full Sadr Pullout?  
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¶5. (C) Al-Askari reported that one Sadr CoR member had told him that Sadr leadership was considering making a complete break with the government. (Note: Sadrist ministers left the government several months ago and Sadrist CoR members are currently boycotting the CoR. End note.) "They are asking what benefit they are getting from serving in the government," he said, noting that Muqtada was half-hearted about participation in the government from the beginning. Al-Askari argued that a complete break would create a major problem, as extreme elements of the Sadrists, backed by Iran, would further turn to violence to advance their goals. Asked what Maliki could do to prevent such a break, al-Askari said that the major carrot of interest to Sadrists was release of key detainees.

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Comment  
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¶6. (C) In addition to reacting to recent episodes of violence in the south, Maliki's remarks may also reflect that he no longer believes he will lose anything by burning bridges with the Sadrists. Maliki has clearly been fed up with Sadr tactics for some time, and he may simply feel the price of trying to placate them is not worth the meager and temporary payback. He may also feel that the group of four will provide him enough political support at the present. The extent of Dawa support for the group of four remains uncertain, however, and Maliki's remarks are likely

to push the Sadrists and Ibrahim al-Jafari, Maliki's chief rival in Dawa, closer together.

¶7. (C) Maliki delivered exactly the sort of message to the Sadrists that we need all respected Shi'a leaders to deliver: Sadrists cannot claim to be legitimate participants in the political process at the same time as they undermine it with violence. Given the pointed and public nature of his remarks, however, it will be critical for Shi'a leaders to manage the Sadrists reaction to contain and minimize violence.

End comment.

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